

-- Silverbell Golf Course Report

Reviewed Monday, March 12, 2012

Reviewer: Jeff Farkas, Greens Committee

I began my review of Silverbell meeting with the Pro Shop cashier, Josh, who indicated he was covering both the restaurant and the Pro Shop. The Tucson Food Group server called in sick and there was no Beverage Cart on the course! Many of the golfers I encountered asked about that. Josh indicated he had had a very busy morning when I began my course review at 11:00 a.m. and when I returned to the Pro Shop at 3:30 p.m., Paul Noonan, Golf Pro (Silverbell and El Rio) was on duty and even at this later hour of the day Paul was continuously busy with new golfers signing in for 9 hole play, serving beverages (he ran out of water bottles and could not access any as the restaurant beverage area was locked), answering phone calls, assigning carts, etc. Paul informed me he had sold 202 rounds for the day. Indeed on my course review it was "back to back golfers" on all 18 holes with a two cart wait at 16th tee. Impressive day and Paul mentioned that Sunday had been even busier. Paul was proud to add he thought Silverbell was leading in rounds sold for the months of February and March! As a note to TCG Management, two other employees (starter host: Andrew, and Driving Range host, John Reis) both conveyed they thought the Pro Shop was understaffed. Paul Noonan, Golf Pro, is doing a yeoman's effort in managing both Silverbell and El Rio and he even commented when he returned after three days of sick leave, he was mired in scheduling, catch-up, and on this day Pro Shop starting activities, answering phones, and serving restaurant mds he had little time to perform his management functions. I question: would it not benefit TCG to hire a Pro Manager for the El Rio Course or additional staff so that Paul could more effectively manage one course?

I drove out to meet with Sean Nicolson, Course Superintendent, at his Maintenance Quonset and Sean shared with me over one hour his plans, activities, his daily staff agenda, and anticipatory functions in the next few months. Allow me to list those items Sean and his staff of eight (2 FTE's; 6 intermittent employees) have accomplished over the past few months during this seasonal "downtime"; and also cite from my 18 hole course review, my suggestions:

- Sean and his crew are continually refurbishing/cannibalizing, repairing and/or purchasing parts for all his old maintenance equipment --- as we spoke his crew were repairing mower blades that had literally eroded or wore down. Sean also showed me his bunker/sand scraper which also needed new tines;

- Planting an area of “greens” (328 grass) in the SW corner of the driving range; this “greens” sod will serve as transplantation sod when needed on the course;
- Added sod transplants to 5th green which has blended well and putts very good;
- Aerated all greens and fairways; Sean commented: “as healthy and mature as it will ever likely be.”
- Was able to cut 8 trees because he now has a chainsaw;
- Cleaned around the two ponds; Note: the 9th pond while not algae infested yet as the evening’s have been cold, it was quite odorous;
- Began two weeks ago cutting greens to 1/8 inch and fairways to ½”;
- While the Bermuda roughs have been dormant, they are now at 2” and while previously sprayed for weeds twice, they will now require cutting to 1” for removal and control of germinating broadleaf weeds; Sean has no more pre-emergent as it was not purchased;
- I saw many instances of what appears to be irrigation leaking causing water pooling/retention on cart paths (especially 13) and in fairways/roughs; If possible these should be attended as cart path asphalt is deteriorating and/or carts are driving off the paths and ruining the turf;
- When I met with Paul Noonan later that day, he commented he needs business cards!

My review of the course entailed driving the entire 18 holes and reviewing the standard features: tee boxes, fairways, course & greenside bunkers, cart paths, inside 100 yds., collars and approaches, and greens. I also measured random yardage markers for distance accuracy consistency. Summarizing, I found the course appearance outstanding as the landing fairways were green and generally very dense. The greens putted truly with few bumps and generally much faster than our TCG usual stimp of 5-7. I estimated a stimp generally of 8 to 9—Sean who has no stimp meter felt it may even be faster. As Sean explained we will never achieve any faster speed as the type of grass is a lower grade/quality and generally appropriate for a muni course. We would likely have to spend financially more and purchase an “Ultra Dwarf” type of grass (e.g., AZ National). And, presently, Sean is cutting the greens at the lowest he can cut to 1/8” and the 328 grass with its blend of poa trivialis looks and putts very truly. The eight different groups of golfers I interviewed all spoke highly of the appearance and more importantly, the play of the greens!

The biggest complaint the golfers I spoke with had was what they opined, was “compacted” and/or moist sand in the bunkers and “hard to play”. The #17 NW greenside bunkers had water pooling at 3:15 p.m.; this bunker needs to be examined. Nevertheless, golfers from New York, North Carolina, Florida, as well as locally (one is a Vistoso member) individually praised the course play and appearance. The Asheville, NC, player conveyed he felt the course as “good as he’s played in NC.” Another local golfer said, “I play here all the time and it’s the best I’ve seen the greens.”

All water coolers/fountains, in the concourse and on the course were cold and running with exception of #7 which will require adjustment as it “sprays” out the water. All the restrooms, in the clubhouse and #13, were clean and stocked; trash barrels appropriate and ball washers full. Paul Noonan’s Bulletin Board was current with March events and posted with fees; the kitchen was clean, neat, and beverages secure (locked containers) in spite of no one in attendance. There were many golfers lounging in the lunch area with beverages and snacks at two times when I was in the clubhouse. I did not see the **“Practice Area Rules”** sign posted in or near the Silverbell “practice area” which I believe the Committee directed in response to a Call to Audience complaint of Ms. S. Nelson during the April 21, 2011 Greens’ Committee Meeting. Did I miss the sign or has it not been posted?

In conclusion, I was very impressed with the overall appearance and condition of all facilities at Silverbell; and rate Paul, Sean, and their staff and crews doing a better than outstanding job, given their staff and resources.